



Missoula Office

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www.defenders.org

EXHIBIT 11
DATE 3/19/09
SB 337

**Testimony to the Montana House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee
by Jonathan Proctor, Defenders of Wildlife**

March 19, 2009

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Jonathan Proctor. I live in Missoula, where I am a Regional Representative for Defenders of Wildlife, a national non-profit conservation organization with more than one million members and supporters including 3,200 members who live in Montana. We have been working on wildlife conservation in Montana for over 30 years.

Our work has included collaborating with several tribal wildlife agencies to restore wildlife – including bison – on tribal lands. These tribal wildlife agencies have worked with few financial resources, but with great dedication. Their bison programs benefit tribal members in many ways, and benefit the millions of Americans who want bison restored to at least a few areas across the plains.

Very few bison exist today that are managed as wildlife; even fewer that are also free of cattle genes; and yet fewer that are also brucellosis free. The Yellowstone bison quarantine study is not popular with many of us in the conservation community, but it has produced several dozen wild, brucellosis-free and genetically valuable Yellowstone bison. It would be unconscionable to prevent their use and force their slaughter through passage of Senate Bill 337.

It is no secret that SB 337 is really about tribal wildlife agencies and a lack of trust in their ability to manage bison. This was made clear by the bill's sponsor in his testimony in the Senate. Rather than place unfair hurdles in their way, we suggest that we work with tribes in Montana to make this bison effort a success. If people have concerns with fencing, then let's help rather than harm. Defenders of Wildlife is working with Fort Peck Fish and Game to raise funds for fencing and for other infrastructure. If the tribes succeed in fundraising, then the fencing concern is taken care of; if they don't succeed, then FWP will not give them the Yellowstone bison.

The Fort Peck and Fort Belknap wildlife agencies will help us solve one of our more difficult wildlife challenges. SB 337 would ruin this opportunity. That is unfair to the tribes who wish to restore an integral part of their history. It is unfair to the bison that have endured far more rigorous brucellosis testing than any of the livestock in this state. And it is unfair to all taxpayers who have paid for this expensive Yellowstone bison brucellosis testing program.

For all of these reasons, Defenders of Wildlife strongly opposes this bill. We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 337. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

National Headquarters

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